DAWN

# Panel to take up NHA chief's absence with PM

• Senate sub-committee also irked by communications secretary continuously skipping meetings • Another body expresses concern over high perks received by govt employees serving on PTCL board

By Syed Irfan Raza and Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The Sub-Committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Communications on Monday decided to lodge a complaint with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif against the National Highway Authority (NHA) chief executive officer and the communications secretary for consistently not attending the panel's meetings.

The meeting of the sub-committee was presided over by its convener, Senator Kamil Ali Agha. Senators Zamir Hussain Ghumro and Saifullah Abro also attended the meeting.

The sub-committee observed with grave concern that despite assurances given in the previous meeting, both the NHA CEO and the communications secretary had failed to attend.

The panel expressed serious concern over the continuous and unjustified absence of the officials.

Taking serious notice of the repeated absence of the communications secretary, the sub-committee observed that such conduct amounted to a breach of privilege of the panel and the House, as standing committees functioned as an extension of parliament.

The panel therefore decided to write a letter to the prime minister through the Senate chairman regarding the misconduct and breach of privilege of the sub-committee and the House by the communications secretary.

**Perks of govt employees on SOEs' boards**

Another Senate body expressed concern over the high perks received by government employees serving on the boards of state-owned enterprises, including the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL).

The Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology sought details of the perks and privileges given to the board members of PTCL.

The panel was informed that PTCL Chairman Zarar Hashim Khan, who is also the incumbent IT and telecom secretary, received $8,000 per board meeting. In addition, Mr Khan was receiving a monthly honorarium of Rs25,000 and was also entitled to a 1,300cc car with a driver provided by the company.

A written response submitted by Zahida Awan, the PTCL secretary, stated that directors of the company's board received a fee equivalent to $5,000 per meeting attended and $1,000 for each member of the board's committees.

The committee chairperson, Senator Palwasha Khan, directed the Law Division to brief the panel on the official policy in this regard.

The committee was informed that as the majority of PTCL shares were owned by the state, the government officers serving on the PTCL board included Commerce Secretary Jawad Paul Khawaja and Finance Secretary Imdad Ullah Bosal. The panel was further apprised that the fourth government nominee on the PTCL board was Ahad Cheema, adviser to the prime minister on establishment.

Members of the committee also sought details of board members of Ufone, a subsidiary of PTCL.

Under another agenda item, the committee was briefed on a case involving alleged corruption of Rs15 million per month. A senior official of the FIA's Anti-Money Laundering Wing said 13 officers in grades 16 to 19 had been convicted in the scandal. Of these, three are on protective bail and two have been granted post-arrest bail, while only Rs1.5 million has been recovered so far.

# FCC takes up first case at new premises

• CJ Aminuddin inaugurates building, resumes hearing on super tax petitions • Lawyers complain about lack of facilities • CJP Afridi opens advocates' room, Litigant Facilitation Centre at SC

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court finally settled into its newly renovated building on Constitution Avenue on Monday, where FCC Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan presided over a bench to resume hearing challenges to the imposition of the super tax inside the refurbished Courtroom No. 1.

Before the hearing, Justice Aminuddin Khan inaugurated the new court building in a simple ceremony attended by Justices Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Aamir Farooq, Ali Baqar Najafi and K.K. Agha, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan, Supreme Court Bar Association President Haroonur Rashid, FCC Registrar Hafeez Khan, along with lawyers and staff of the new establishment.

The FCC has a total sanctioned strength of 13 judges. Soon after its establishment, the FCC was shifted to the Islamabad High Court on a temporary basis, though it was originally envisaged that the new apex court would be housed in the building designated for the Federal Shariat Court (FSC). The FCC had to move to the IHC after FSC judges resisted the plan and denied access to their premises.

Courtroom No. 1 has been completely revamped with new furniture and fixtures, replacing the older seating, along with the installation of a modern audio system to facilitate lawyers and litigants.

However, a senior lawyer expressed disappointment over the currently available facilities in the building. "Neither is there a bar room for lawyers nor any canteen for litigants inside the FCC," Advocate Tallat Abbas Khan told *Dawn*, adding that lawyers had no choice but to cross the road and enter the Supreme Court building just to sit and rest after a day's work.

He said that since the FCC had become the country's top court, it would attract a large number of lawyers and litigants in the future, but the facilities currently available were insufficient to cope with the expected volume.

ISLAMABAD: A view of the new Federal Constitutional Court building.—Tanveer Shahzad

Inside Courtroom No. 1, lawyer Rashid Anwar complained before a three-judge bench headed by the FCC chief justice, hearing the super tax case, that he could not determine how much time he had consumed during arguments as there was no wall clock in the courtroom.

At this, the chief justice observed that the present set-up lacked several facilities, but assured that the issues would be addressed soon.

Referring to a request regarding video-link facilities to different cities, the chief justice said that while the facility was currently not available, it might be provided in the future.

The new FCC building houses seven courtrooms, though only three are currently functional, all located on the first floor. Recently, 22,910 cases were transferred from the Supreme Court to the FCC.

**Litigant Facilitation Centre**

In a separate development, Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi inaugurated a newly constructed room for advocates-on-record and a Litigant Facilitation Centre at the Supreme Court building as part of ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening service delivery and improving access to justice.

SCBA President Haroonur Rashid, along with members of his cabinet, was also present on the occasion. The newly established centre will provide structured facilitation to advocates-on-record, enabling them to guide litigants on procedural requirements, case filing, documentation and related matters.

However, some lawyers said the facility did not adequately cater to their needs.

# 'Pakistan airspace not being used by US against Iran'

Govt sees propaganda originating from Afghanistan, India

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Monday rejected reports circulating on social media alleging that Pakistan is being used as a base or launch corridor to support the United States for a possible military strike on Iran.

The ministry's fact check account on X attributed the claims to "propaganda machineries in Afghanistan" and Indian accounts, particularly identifying three handles — Khurasan Media Urdu, Baba Banaras and Afghan Defence.

Among them, a post by Khurasan Media Urdu claimed that "special American aircraft have reached Pakistan for an attack on Iran". The post also mentioned "unusual" flight activity of US aerial refuelling and surveillance aircraft between Pakistan and Iran.

A post by Afghan Defence repeated the claim.

Baba Banaras' post made a similar claim, stating: "Multiple US reconnaissance aircraft and cargo planes with weapons landed at Dalbandin Airbase and Pasni Airbase of Pakistan. Looks like the game has been set for Iran."

The ministry's fact check account said false claims had been made "that the US has moved aerial refuelling (KC-135R) and surveillance aircraft to Pakistan, that these aircraft are conducting unusual flights towards or into Iranian airspace, and that Pakistan is being used as a base or launch corridor to support US stealth fighters (F-35/F-22) for a possible imminent military strike on Iran".

The post added that US refuelling aircraft activity increased, but not from Pakistan. *Reuters* noted large movements to Europe due to rising Middle East tensions, the ministry clarified, citing a June 2025 report.

It also referred to a June 2025 report by *The Washington Post*, which it said mentioned Pentagon dispatching "refuelling aircraft to European bases as posture expanded".

The ministry's post further stated: "No credible outlet confirms that US KC-135R/ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) aircraft are operating in Pakistan."

It reiterated that "US refuelling aircraft movements have been reported, but mostly linked to Europe".

"No credible proof that US aircraft/ISR are based in Pakistan. No credible proof of Pakistan-to-Iran operational flights for strikes," it added.

It recalled that Pakistan "publicly condemned US strikes on Iran," referencing its stance during a 12-day war involving Iran, Israel, and US actions in Iran.

"This denies the 'Pakistan is facilitating strikes' story," the ministry stated. "It's a reckless narrative dragging Pakistan into a US-Iran conflict without evidence." It concluded that the claim that "US aircraft arrived in Pakistan for Iran strikes' is purely disinformation".

# PM directs setting new targets for vocational training programmes

Digitisation of Haj procedures ordered

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday expressed satisfaction over performance of National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) and directed it to set new targets to improve outcomes in future and ensure implementation of the Apprenticeship Law.

The prime minister was chairing a review meeting on the newly introduced vocational training programmes in the country, during which ongoing training programmes under NAVTTC were reviewed in detail.

The prime minister said that providing international certifications to Pakistani manpower to enhance global competitiveness was a welcome development.

He directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis to accelerate efforts to increase absorption of Pakistani skilled labour in Gulf countries.

The prime minister emphasised that Pakistani youth possessed immense potential and that a comprehensive programme had been launched through NAVTTC to harness these capabilities. He said that a biometric attendance system be implemented for trainees and instructors in all NAVTTC partner training institutions.

Emphasising coordination with provincial institutions, the prime minister instructed that NAVTTC programmes be expanded to provide training to a larger workforce across the country.

He further said that providing youth with training along with international certifications in skills that were in high global demand should remain the top priority. The prime minister directed that membership of institutions showing unsatisfactory performance under NAVTTC be suspended and strict action be taken against them.

He also instructed that complete digitisation of the NAVTTC system and online monitoring mechanisms be further strengthened and made more effective.

The meeting was attended by private-sector third-party validators working with NAVTTC, industrial partners, professional firms, representatives of chambers of commerce and business associations, as well as experts from the artificial intelligence and information technology sectors.

The meeting was informed that targets assigned by the prime minister for NAVTTC training programmes had been successfully achieved.

**Digitisation of Haj procedures**

PM Shehbaz on Monday directed the National Information Technology Board (NITB) officials to ensure digitisation of all necessary stages of Haj to facilitate pilgrims and make their access to government facilities easier.

He appreciated the extensive preparations made by the Ministry of Information Technology and other ministries concerned to set up Asan Khidmat Markaz in the federal capital.—APP

# PTI urges release of political prisoners, reconstitution of ECP

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The Parliamentary Party of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) on Monday demanded the withdrawal of cases against founding chairman Imran Khan and the reconstitution of the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Meeting at Parliament House under Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, the party passed a unanimous resolution seeking the immediate release of political prisoners and the restoration of family visits for the former prime minister. The group claimed the country is passing through a "sensitive phase."

Participants called on democratic forces to agree on a new Charter of Democracy to ensure transparent, free and fair elections so people can elect their true representatives. The resolution also demanded the implementation of the Peace Jirga declaration for lasting peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The party condemned the police brutality against the Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan in Punjab and obstacles created for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister in Sindh.

Paying tribute to Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan and de-seated members, the group praised supporters in Lahore and Karachi for demonstrating their struggle for democratic rights.

# President leaves for Bahrain

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, accompanied by a high-level delegation, will undertake an official visit to Bahrain from Jan 13 to 16.

During the visit, the president will hold meeting with Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who is also the prime minister, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Office on Monday.

"The discussions will focus on bilateral, regional, and international issues of mutual interest," the FO said.

"The visit seeks to reinforce Pakistan's long-standing cooperation with the brotherly Gulf nation while expanding opportunities for collaboration in trade and economic partnership, defence and security, and people-to-people ties," it added.

Last year in November, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, during a two-day visit to Bahrain, had reiterated Pakistan's commitment to deepening ties with the kingdom.

Discussing economic relations, the prime minister had underlined Pakistan's desire to expand trade and investment.

Earlier in September, Bahrain's interior minister had visited Pakistan, with the two countries agreeing to enhance cooperation in the fields of counterterrorism, anti-narcotics, and immigration.—Dawn Report

WORKERS clear ice blocks from a supply channel to a power house in Misgar, upper Hunza.—Photo by the writer

# GB in grip of severe cold as 3 die of 'LPG leakage'

• Power outages hit 20 hours amid firewood and gas shortage • PMD denies any 'extreme cold wave across Pakistan'

By Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan is in the grip of severe cold temperatures as local people are suffering multiple difficulties owing to acute power shortages and absence of basic facilities.

Three people, including a woman tourist, died due to suffocation caused by LPG leakage in Ghanche and Skardu.

According to police, a couple died of suffocation inside a room due to leakage of LPG in Khawla Brah area of Ghanche district.

The couple had been married only three months ago and were residing together at their home. The couple went to sleep on Sunday night in a room where an LPG heater was operational.

Later, family members found them lying unconscious inside the room. They were immediately shifted to DHQ Hospital, Khaplu, where they were declared dead on Monday.

In another incident, a woman tourist was found dead while her husband was injured due to LPG suffocation in their hotel room in Skardu on Sunday.

Police said the tourist couple from Punjab's Talagang area were sleeping in a local hotel room in Skardu. They added that both of them were found unconscious on Sunday and shifted to hospital, where the woman was declared dead. The police suspected that leakage of LPG in the room caused her death, while the condition of her husband is stable.

The body was dispatched to their native village, while police have kicked off an investigation into the matter.

**'20-hour power outages'**

People across the region are facing severe difficulties due to harsh weather, with most of them remaining indoors. Locals said the region faced over 20 hours of power outages during winter, along with shortages of firewood and gas.

**Unchecked LPG use: Editorial on Page 6**

Authorities said that in upper areas of Baltistan — Astore, Hunza, Nagar, and Ghizer — the mercury plunged to minus 16 degrees Celsius on Sunday night, bringing life to a standstill.

Ahmed Khan, a local resident of Astore, told *Dawn* that residents had been experiencing harsh weather conditions since this week.

Frozen water has made roads slippery, while unavailability and high prices of firewood and electricity shortages have added to the misery of people.

Zulfiqar Ali from Skardu said tourism, the main source of income for locals, had declined completely, leaving people jobless.

Other activities, including agriculture and local commerce, have also been suspended.

Rahim Karim from Gojal said the area experienced less snowfall this year; however, temperatures plunged to minus 14 degrees Celsius. People in the area depend on tourism, which is seasonal, and for half of the year many remain jobless.

**PMD refutes claims**

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) certain social media platforms were circulating misleading and unverified forecasts claiming an extreme cold wave across Pakistan from Jan 16 to 25, with record-breaking temperatures.

The PMD refuted these claims, clarifying that no such extreme or historic cold wave was expected during this period.

It advised the public and stakeholders to rely solely on official forecasts, warnings, and advisories issued by the PMD and to avoid spreading unverified information that might cause unnecessary concern.